

50 Ways to Create a Difference

"When we think about libraries and the work that we've seen around the world, we really think that libraries are driving community development. It's not just about the technology; technology is merely a tool. It's about how libraries are having an impact on lives through their services."

Darren Hoerner, Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Ideas for Nebraska libraries to be a part of economic development and growing our state:

Economic Development through added Business Services

1. Job postings board (physical or digital)
2. Meeting space for BRE program (Business, Retention & Expansion visits/interviews held with local businesses) for businesses who prefer not to meet on their business location due to confidentiality concerns, to minimize interruption, etc.
3. Host maker spaces to spur creativity, job skills development, career exploration, entrepreneurship
4. Meeting space for various job or business skills training (IT, entrepreneurship, business plans, SCORE, customer service training)
5. Host business popups for small businesses not needing a full time retail space; sometimes all it takes is a small area, preferably with a window to benefit both parties with greater foot traffic
6. Help local businesses register on google
7. Advertise co-working space hours where telecommuters can get some human interaction ☺ and entrepreneurs have a place to call an office for a few hours a week
8. Reach out to businesses displaced by disaster (fire, weather, etc.) to determine if the library can help bridge a gap for office space in the immediate aftermath; access to a computer, internet, phone and fax may be really helpful
9. Develop a sound proof room for individuals to record ads, vlogs, or other media recordings for business.

10. Invite local artists to showcase their art in the library, set up an avenue to selling their artwork (PayPal accounts). Create an Art Fair.
11. Books/podcasts/media relating to economic or community development
12. Site for communities to host site visits from businesses looking to locate in your community
13. Ask to attend your local economic development meeting and ask how you can help.
14. Promote need for digital awareness and implications for business development.
15. Serve as a resource for the Village Board/Councils and city administrators gathering research, data for economic development grants and reports.
16. Offer free Wi-Fi (often faster than home) to help people job search or to help entrepreneurs get a business off the ground
17. Free online Training Program Night (Coursera.com, www.openedu/itunes). Invite local guest speaker/resource provider to facilitate discussions following the training workshop.
18. Have computers, laptops on loan for individuals to check out.

Economic Development through Tourism

1. Put your events on regional and state tourism pages to attract new visitors and to enhance the experience for tourists already planning to visit your community
2. Serve as a mini visitor's bureau if you don't have one in your community; serve tourism crowd with temporary checkouts; brochures/one page handouts of community events/bookmarks on a library computer with community and regional information; Wi-Fi, water, a clean restroom are a nice touch and will make a great impression for your community
3. Engage with local campgrounds with programming – might be tourists; sometimes its workers staying in the area for construction; either way, let them know about library and/or community events
4. Have a space for brochures (tourism, business services)
5. Partner with local welcome committee (chamber, community clubs, economic development) to make sure a magnet, bookmark or something with library hours and info is included
6. Look for fun ways to partner with other activities/recreation (parks, pools) as all - of these things attract people to your community and keep people in your community
7. People love old buildings! Embrace your historic library (current or former locations) by posting pics, having tidbits of information posted around the building to tell that story
8. Work with museum - can you have the keys to let people in for a short tour if they are rarely open
9. Partner with newspaper, cemetery, and historical society to be a resource for genealogy research

Adding to the Quality of Life – Community Services

1. Computers/IT for locals to apply for jobs
2. Host meetings with various service providers who support workforce development
3. Help maintain a community website if you have someone on staff who has those skills
4. Invite various regional organizations to utilize your meeting space at low/no cost before they ask you to build those connections and get different people to visit your community and enhance retail foot traffic
5. Software and helping people use it (Adobe Pro to make PDFs, Photo Shop, Office, etc. – anything that you can afford that might be too high of a price point for a home user to justify) to help with worker skills training, entrepreneurial development, local economic development staff needs
6. Children’s programming afterschool/summer/evenings to help bridge childcare gaps; you don’t have to provide child care, but having a safe place for children is an awesome resource for parents and their employers; look for partnership opportunities with employers as they may be willing to support mutually beneficial programs
7. A nice public space like a library can encourage other improvements in the neighborhood, from “sprucing up” to new residential and commercial development
8. Host a community gathering for new residents or those who want to learn more about the community (example in Norfolk is a monthly Know Your Neighbor event)
9. Work with local/regional hospital to provide immunization clinics, health awareness clinics, etc.
10. Hold family nights – movie showings, guest readers, small plays, etc.

Expanding Library Presence in Community

1. Job share between library staff and economic development staff
2. Highlight local/regional/state artists by hosting book tours
3. Be open during local celebrations and retail promotion events outside of normal library hours if you can
4. Work with a facilitator to host a visioning “what if” discussion with locals, including youth:
 - a. Engage junior high and high school students by asking them what they’d like to see at their local library; youth who feel valued are more likely to stay or return
5. Utilize Overdrive/Libby/interlibrary loans and make sure people know about it; doing so makes a small library a big library!
6. Literacy – goes without saying, maybe, but don’t gloss over the fact that literacy is a vital job skill
7. Thing about how you can serve growing diversity through books/materials/resources in multiple languages

8. Work with your municipal utility to include library info and library card signup form when people pay utility deposit
9. Hold a Book drive (people have lots of books purchased at home and need places to go with them once read).
10. Work with community to start a Little Free Library | Take a Book – Share a Book program– link back to Library to create more visibility and extend hours.
11. Hold a Book Fair – use monies to open a coffee bar, create co-working spaces, etc.
12. Reach out to local organizations – get on speaker list to update residents on new library services, events.
13. Create a “welcoming” area outside of the library with tables, chairs for public conversations. Hold special coffee days to encourage people to visit the library.

Remember, you can't do it all. But you DO have an important part in economic development. Start small and look for one or two strategies that you can implement this week/month/quarter. Let your local/regional/county government and economic development entity know that you want to be a partner and what you are doing to help make your community better positioned for economic growth.

What else? What ideas do YOU have?

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